

Final Report Subject to Reformatting and Printing

Achievement Gap Elimination: Report of the Missouri K-16 Task Force

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Foreword

In a democratic society, the circumstances surrounding birth should not determine an individual's educational privilege. After more than two hundred years of public education in America, wide gaps in educational opportunity persist for many school children living in inner cities, those living in poverty, and those who are members of minority groups. Missouri formed a K-16 Coalition in 1997 to promote high standards and smooth transitions for *all* students. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE), the State Board of Education (SBE), and the University of Missouri Board of Curators (UM) are cosponsors of this collaborative, statewide initiative. The work of Missouri's K-16 Coalition builds on the state's long-standing interest in teacher quality and its effect on student achievement.

Missouri's first formal K-16 project, directed by Dr. Melvin George, resulted in the publication of *Mathematics in Missouri* in December 1999. This report identified enhancing teacher quality as one of several important strategies for improving mathematics learning in Missouri schools. The report also reinforced the continued use of performance funding incentives to support high entrance and exit standards for teacher education programs.

In February 2001, Missouri's K-16 cosponsors launched another major initiative by appointing a K-16 Task Force on Achievement Gap Elimination (K-16-TAGE). Under the leadership of Dr. Charles J. McClain, former Missouri Commissioner of Higher Education, prominent Missouri citizens agreed to work collaboratively in the design of recommendations to be submitted to each K-16 sponsoring board. K-16-TAGE was charged with reviewing issues, studying best practices, and making public its recommendations about ways to improve student academic achievement at all levels. K-16-TAGE members were also charged with identifying performance indicators that could be used to monitor, and provide incentives for, improving teacher quality. Early in the process, a Request for Information (RFI) was distributed widely to Missouri educational organizations and institutions inviting briefing papers and reports. The RFI targeted teacher and principal quality, professional development, alternative certification, curriculum and assessment alignment, and characteristics of high- and low-performing schools as topics of interest to K-16-TAGE. Reports and papers submitted in response to the RFI were used to inform the work of the K-16-TAGE.

K-16-TAGE members genuinely believe that eliminating achievement gaps in the performance of Missouri's students is an ethical imperative that must be addressed. Enhancing teacher quality is identified as the most important strategy for improving student achievement. Underlying all of the K-16-TAGE's recommendations and strategies is the belief in the value of local autonomy in Missouri's system of public education. Each school district and each postsecondary institution sets policies and establishes practices within the boundaries of state laws and regulations governing education. Local leaders are uniquely situated to determine what works best for local teachers and students. The diversity of policies and practices throughout the state presents certain challenges to the boards that oversee education in Missouri. The boards must be prepared to address these challenges in order to have all Missouri educators working together toward a common goal of eliminating the achievement gaps among Missouri students.